

**Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's Housing
Committee in Support of Raised Bill No. 6554:
An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs**

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Vice Chair Lesser and Vice Chair Khan, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and members of the Committee on Appropriations: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support Raised Bill 6554: An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs.

I'm on the Board FISH/ Friends in Service to Humanity of Northwestern Connecticut. We are a 35 bed homeless shelter (of which 5 beds are designated for homeless veterans). We're also a food pantry, serving individuals and families in the greater Northwestern corner of our state.

I am here today to speak in support of this budget measure, which will help our state's homeless response system respond to the overwhelming demand for housing and homeless services statewide.

Connecticut is facing unprecedented challenges in our effort to prevent and end homelessness. Our lifesaving system is overburdened, historically underfunded, and confronting a workforce shortage that threatens the statewide safety net we provide. Our Homeless Response System providers are facing a fiscal cliff, with critical federal funding set to expire. **The legislature should invest \$50,000,000 to Rescue the Homeless Response System.** Only through this commitment to investment can we ensure that homelessness is infrequent and short-term, saving lives and public dollars.

Of the total \$50,000,000 investment, we urge this committee to commit the following amounts as dedicated, reliable sources of funding:

1. **\$37,046,452** to address chronic underfunding of homeless response nonprofits and to ensure adequate wages for front-line homeless response workers:
 - \$28,155,326 increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$7,713,799 increase in DMHAS Housing/Supports Services line
 - \$967,373 increase in DOH Homeless Youth line
 - \$209,954 increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
2. **\$5.95 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for Coordinated Access Network infrastructure. As an emergency response system, we need stable and permanent funding to support our infrastructure. Without funding, thousands of Connecticut residents would be put at immediate risk of homelessness every year.
3. **\$5 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for the annual

Cold Weather Emergency Response Program. Every winter, our system strains to provide cold weather emergency services and to meet the demand for professional staff, wages for emergency-level services, and enough beds to keep people from freezing outside.

4. **\$2 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for a Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool to subsidize housing and provide flexible assistance. Flexible funding has been found to reduce the systemic costs of homelessness to public health and emergency response systems, resulting in both lower costs to the health care system and improved individual health outcomes.

We find ourselves overwhelmed with homeless issues that have only increased since COVID. We're seeing seniors on a fixed income being displaced because their rents are doubling and tripling and they have no way to pay for it. They end up living in their cars or on the streets. We also see cases we're not equipped to handle such as mental health issues, dementia, and serious health issues like cancer. These cases are beyond the scope of what we're equipped to handle at our shelter. We also need money to fund the overflow operations that are critical to keeping those on the streets safe and warm in the bitter winter months. Much of the support we got from area churches for the overflow operation ended during COVID and has not been replaced. This is a life threatening situation that must be addressed. And the 211 system that's supposed to direct those in need with the available resources is broken as well due to underfunding.

There has been no increase to the Federal HUD funding we receive to run the shelter (which only provides a fraction of our operating budget; we fund raise the rest) and no support from the State of Connecticut's coffers. We need your help!

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify. It is with your support that we can rescue the homeless response system and help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

Maura Malo
Board Member
FISH/ Friends in Service to Humanity of Northwestern Connecticut